

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4339
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 2911

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR PINT MOPS LE IS PLO
SUBJ: SOUTH LEBANON - JOURNALISTS' VIEWS

1. SUMMARY: WESTERN JOURNALISTS SEE FEW SIGNS THAT SITUATION IN SOUTH LEBANON IS LIKELY TO EXPLODE. END SUMMARY.
2. EMBOFF MET WITH BALTIMORE SUN JOURNALIST MICHAEL PARKS JUNE 15. PARKS HAD JUST FLOWN TO BEIRUT, WHICH HE PERIODICALLY VISITS FROM HIS BASE IN CAIRO. THE PRECEDING WEEK HE HAD BEEN IN ISRAEL, AND WAS PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN ISRAELI ACTIONS AND INTENTIONS VIS-A-VIS SOUTH LEBANON. PARKS SAID THAT HE HAD TALKED TO NUMEROUS ISRAELI OFFICIALS, CIVILIAN AND MILITARY (INCLUDING ISF G-2 GAZIT) ABOUT ISRAEL'S NORTHERN BORDER, AND HAD FOUND ALMOST UNIVERSALLY RELAXED ATTITUDE. (WE NOTE GAZIT HAS CONVEYED SAME IMPRESSION TO AMBASSADOR LEWIS--TEL AVIV 4407.)
3. PARKS, TOGETHER WITH REUTERS CORRESPONDENT BERND DEBUSMANN, CONFIDENTIAL

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VISITED SOUTH LEBANON JUNE 16. PARKS TALKED TO EMBOFF UPON HIS RETURN LATE THAT SAME DAY, AND DEBUSMANN TALKED TO DATT (DEBUSMANN FILED REUTERS DISPATCH JUNE 16). THE TWO JOURNALISTS HAD TRAVELED, VIA TYRE AND BINT JUBAYL, TO THE MARJAYUN AREA, WHERE THEY SPENT TWO HOURS IN PARTS OF THE CHRISTIAN SECTOR, BUT WERE NOT ALLOWED IN OTHER PARTS. THEY TALKED TO "LEBANESE FORCES" COMMANDER HADDAD NEAR THE METULLA GATE. HADDAD WAS ASTOUNDED

TO LEARN THAT THEY HAD GOTTEN THERE VIA LEBANON, SAID THEY WERE THE FIRST WESTERN JOURNALISTS IN THE AREA IN ABOUT FOUR MONTHS.

4. HADDAD'S PERSPECTIVE. PARKS SAID HADDAD WAS DETERMINED TO HANG ON TO THE SMALL CHRISTIAN ENCLAVES IN SOUTH LEBANON, WHILE COMPLAINING VOCIFEROUSLY OF SHORTAGES OF FOOD, WATER, AND MEDICINE. HE DID NOT COMPLAIN, TO PARKS AT LEAST, ABOUT LACK OF SUPPORT FROM CHRISTIAN FRONT MILITIAS IN BEIRUT AREA, WHO--HADDAD RECOGNIZED--HAD NO MEANS OF GETTING SUPPORT TO HIM (EXCEPT VIA ISRAEL). HADDAD SAID SYRIANS FROM CONSIDERABLE DISTANCE NORTH OF MARJAYUN AT KAFR MISHKI INCESSANTLY SHELLED CHRISTIAN POSITIONS AROUND MARJAYUN USING 130MM GUNS AND ROCKETS, BUT HE SAID THE SHELLING WAS PARTICULARLY INTENSIVE WHENEVER THE CHRISTIANS SHELLED PALESTINIAN POSITIONS. PARKS' IMPRESSION FROM HADDAD WAS THAT ISRAELIS WERE SUPPLYING THE CHRISTIANS WITH "JUST ENOUGH TO HOLD ON." THE CHRISTIANS GET LIMITED AMOUNTS OF AMMUNITION, WATER, AND MEDICINE FREE FROM THE ISRAELIS BUT MUST PAY FOR FOOD IN ISRAELI POUNDS. HADDAD SEEMED TO HAVE NO HOPE WHATSOEVER THAT THE ISRAELIS THEMSELVES WOULD GET DIRECTLY INVOLVED ON THE GROUND IN THE SOUTH. PARKS QUOTED HADDAD AS SAYING, "NOBODY HAS GAINED OR LOST A METER OF GROUND SINCE TAIBEH" (A REFERENCE TO THE CHRISTIAN OFFENSIVE IN THE AREA OF TAIBEH IN EARLY APRIL).

5. MARJAYUN SITUATION. PARKS SAID HE OBSERVED THAT THE CHRISTIAN FORCES IN THE MARJAYUN AREA WERE VERY HEAVILY ARMED. ARMED PERSONNEL CARRIERS TYPICALLY HAD NOT ONE BUT THREE MACHINE GUNS MOUNTED. EVEN HALF-GROWN CHILDREN CARRIED RIFLES. SHELLING, WHILE HE WAS IN THE AREA, WAS SPORADIC AND DESULTORY. AT THE

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BORDER, PARKS SAID HE SAW TRACK MARKS OBVIOUSLY MADE BY HEAVY ISRAELI VEHICLES. THE ONLY ACCESS TO MARJAYUN ON LEBANESE TERRITORY, PARKS SAID, WAS VIA PALESTINIAN-CONTROLLED BINT JUBAYL, THE ROADS WESTWARD TO NABATIYAH AND NORTHWARD TO THE BEKAA BEING MINED AND SUBJECT TO SNIPER FIRE.

6. BETWEEN MARJAYUN AND BINT JUBAYL. PARKS SAID THERE SEEMED TO BE NO SIGN OF FIGHTING AT ALL ANYWHERE BETWEEN BINT JUBAYL AND MARJAYUN. HE SAW NEITHER PALESTINIAN FIGHTERS NOR CHRISTIAN FIGHTERS IN THE AREA. NOR WERE THERE MANY LOCAL INHABITANTS. DEBUSMANN FELT EVEN SMALL LCF UNITS COULD MOVE PRACTICALLY UNOPPOSED TO BINT JUBAYL FROM QULAYAH.

7. SITUATION IN BINT JUBAYL. PARKS SAID HIS IMPRESSION WAS THAT FATAH HAD REDUCED ITS FORCES IN BINT JUBAYL, LEAVING BEHIND A "B TEAM." HE HAD NO IDEA WHERE THE LARGER FORCES WHICH HAD BEEN THERE PREVIOUSLY MIGHT HAVE GONE. HE SAID THERE STILL WERE OCCASIONAL SINGLE ROUNDS OF ARTILLERY EXCHANGED BETWEEN BINT JUBAYL AND AYN IBL.

8. SITUATION IN TYRE. CONTRARY TO SOME RECENT REPORTING, PARKS SAID THAT PALESTINIANS WERE MOST DEFINITELY NOT REPEAT NOT IN CONTROL OF TYRE. HE DESCRIBED A MOTLEY "POLITICAL COUNCIL" CONTROLLING THE CITY, COMPOSED OF NUMEROUS ELEMENTS, BOTH PALESTINIAN AND LEBANESE. SITUATION IN THE CITY ON JUNE 16 AT LEAST WAS COMPLETELY QUIET.

9. AMBASSADOR TALKED TO AP CORRESPONDENT NICK LUDDINGTON JUNE 15. LUDDINGTON AND L.A. TIMES CORRESPONDENT JOE ALEX MORRIS HAD VISITED TYRE JUNE 14. THEIR GENERAL IMPRESSION OF LACK OF REAL ACTION IN SOUTH PARALLELS PARKS' PERSPECTIVE. LUDDINGTON SAID THE AD HOC POLITICAL ORGANISM CONTROLLING TYRE THESE DAYS WAS COMPOSED OF PFLP ON THE PALESTINIAN REJECTIONIST SIDE, AND OF PSP, PPS, MURABITUN, ARAB SOCIALIST UNION, AND COMMUNISTS ON THE LEBANESE SIDE, PLUS SOME IRAQIS OF BAATHI PERSUASION. THEY MAINTAIN, HOWEVER, THAT THE PFLP REALLY RUNS THE TOWN.
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10. COMMENT: PARKS AND LUDDINGTON ARE EXPERIENCED AND DISPASSIONATE WAR CORRESPONDENTS, AND WE BELIEVE THEIR ACCOUNTS ARE CREDIBLE. DEBUSMANN HAS BEEN AROUND FOR SOME TIME TOO.
PARKER

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